

February 19, 2013

Members of Appropriations Committee:

The African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) is a critical constituency in the State of Connecticut. This commission has proved time and again its value in black communities as well as throughout Connecticut.

The African-American Affairs Commission also reflects the cultural montage of the members which make up this organization and distinguishes them from other groups. The name of this organization reflects the ancestral embodiment of our native land, Africa.

Among the responsibilities of the Commission are: Education: to perpetuate our ancestral heritage in our community and utilize those skills for the betterment of our people; Programming: to inspire, enlighten, unify and challenge the African American Community; Support: to assist in the efforts of those organizations, which perpetuate like ideologies; and External Development: to be accountable through representation. As a Commission, our desire is to further develop our community to its fullest capabilities that are aligned with the greatness of African traditions.

Detractors often refer to this as advocacy for special interests, but our motto, *e pluribus unum*, "one out of the many," recognizes that each distinct part is essential to the whole. Some policy makers have suggested that the best way to address black needs is to bury them in universal strategies, assuming that we will benefit without drawing attention to race. While this may have some political appeal, too often it does not work. Researchers have concluded that universal strategies too often miss the mark. The simple reason is that different groups are situated differently. For this reason, I advocate the autonomy of AAAC.

I believe that combining the commissions under one umbrella may accomplish a universal strategy to address societal problems, but it will inevitably fail black communities that are most impacted. The AAAC must be autonomous in communicating and addressing the needs of the African American community in this state. The "umbrella" would water down all of the commissions' needs. Even though it could be argued that the needs are similar, there are still so many nuanced issues in each of the commission's mandates that there could hardly be enough emphasis or focus on issues to be impactful. It is a disservice to the people of Connecticut and a slap in the face to the organizations that worked so hard to form the AAAC. This commission was formed to target and tailor our dire circumstances, beginning with black males.

The strategy to achieve these goals and implementation should be based on our situation and needs. We call this targeted universalism. The goal is universal, but the strategy is targeted and tailored to our circumstances.

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Consider the goal of moving everyone from the first floor to the fifth floor of a building, and that the means of conveyance is an escalator. For most people, an escalator will suffice. For a person in a wheelchair, an escalator is useless. Nor would anyone insist that tide walls built for New York also be built in Kansas. The strategy employed must be mindful of how people are situated in the world. Universal approaches fail in this regard.

In conclusion, I offer that we keep commissions separate, thereby allowing them to operate in a manner that I believe is most comprehensive and effective for all people. I suggest that commissions come together at least twice a year to share strategies, ideas and successes to maximize effectiveness. In this way, we can become more effective, socially, politically, and economically to benefit our entire state and help make a positive impact throughout our great state.

Sincerely,

Donna Campbell